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AUTHOR Buzzee, Linda L.
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes coaching golf as an art and a science that requires the effective integration of the golfer's mind and body. In typical coaching situations it is presumed that the coach's task is to provide the student with a knowledge of the rules, swing mechanics, and course management skills. A coach's task includes much more, however. The coach's role should be defined as the ability to blend golf knowledge, teaching skills, and ability to allow the physical-mechanical aspects of golf to become intertwined with the cognitive characteristics of each player. Coaching strategies are suggested that address error corrections in terms of the physical and psychological requirements needed to elicit a change in performance of a specific golf or course management skill. Setting-up is described as a phase of the golf swing that prepares the mind and body for the execution of the shot. Further sections discuss initiating the swing, sequential analysis of the set-up, shot planning, and the full swing. Final sections discuss keeping instructions simple, resisting the urge to make multiple corrections over a short period of time, using language that does not instill fear, and bridging the gap between golf knowledge and effective shot production. (JB)

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Integrating the Mind and Body of the High School and Collegiate Golfer

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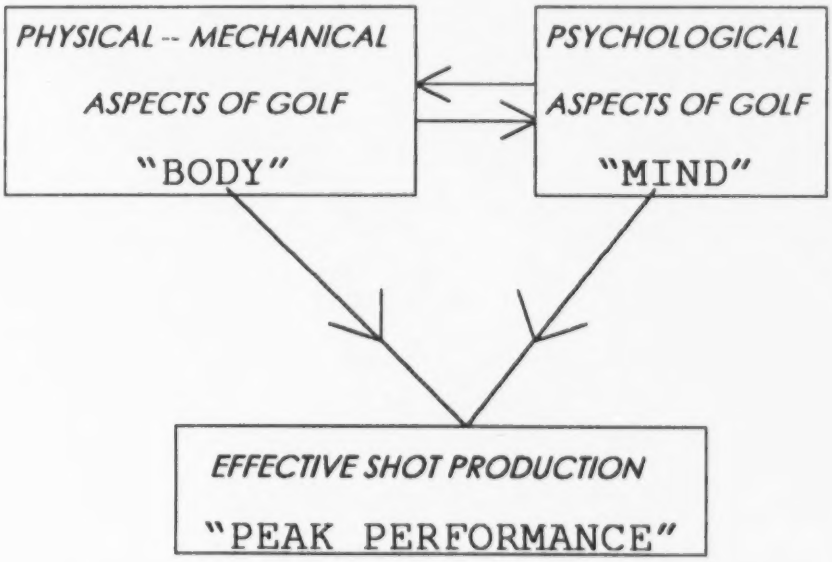
Coaching golf is an art and science that requires the effective integration of the golfer's mind and body. Typically the golf coach must be competent in golf swing analysis and error detection, biomechanical principles of the full swing, course strategies, and laws of ball flight. These items represent the mechanical aspects of golf that should be indigenous to the movement of the golfer's body. However, golf coaches must have an awareness of the cognitive aspects of golf -- the "thought side of golf". The cognitive aspects of golf are concerned with a golfers attention, memory, thinking and problem solving process for effective course management, imagery, perception, language, and the transformation of golf knowledge into effective shot production. These cognitive aspects of golf represent the " golf mind ".

Simply stated, a successful golf coach must have the knowledge and ability to meld the mechanics of golf movement with the cognitive aspects of each individual on the golf team. The coach's presentation of the mechanical aspects of golf and course strategies can be directed to the team collectively, however the translation and use of this knowledge requires the coach's attention to the player as an "individual person".



LEARNING -- PERFORMANCE CONNECTION

The melding of the physical and psychological aspects of golf will produce competitive golfers that display the following attributes.

- Highly Focused
- Effortless Swing Execution
- Physically and Mentally Relaxed
- Self-confident
- In Control of Course Performance
- Positive Thoughts
- Attentive to "Each" Shot
- Finds Competition to be "FUN"

In order for the physical and psychological aspects of the golfer to come together to generate a peak performance, the golfer must treat each shot as a single goal. Most of the time par for a golf course is 72 strokes, which translates into 72 goals that each team member must strive to achieve for each match. The typical golf team usually fields 6 players per competition. Thus, on the average a golf team will strive to attain approximately 432 goals per match. The number of these goals the team achieves will translate into the overall number of successful competitive experiences within a given season.

In typical coaching situations it is presumed that the task of the golf coach is to provide the student with a knowledge of the rules, swing mechanics, and course management skills. However, the tasks of a successful coach include much more than a presentation of these golf skills. In essence, the role of the golf coach should be defined as the ability to blend golf knowledge, teaching skills, and

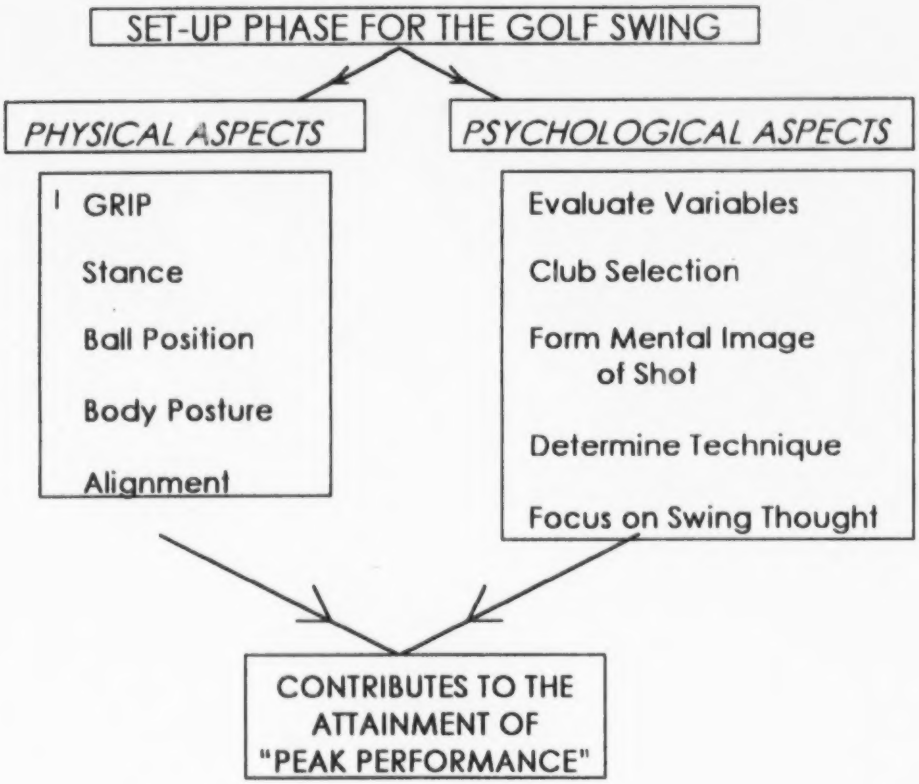
dispositions (mental and moral attributes) in such a manner as to allow the physical-mechanical aspects of golf to become intertwined with the cognitive characteristics of each player. This merger will maximize the number of goals achieved by the team, from a possible 432 goals required to achieve par for each match. The coach should not evaluate the performance of a player by the total score for a round, but rather by the number of goals he/she has achieved which contributes to the overall endeavor of the team. The coach's ability to merge the physical and psychological aspects of each player can be measured by the number of goals accomplished by the team in any given match.

COACHING STRATEGIES THAT UNITE THE MIND AND BODY OF COMPETITIVE GOLFERS

In most instances golf literature is dichotomous in so far as there are publications directed toward mechanical analysis, and other publications that are focused toward the psychological aspects of the golfer. The remainder of this presentation will provide coaches with strategies that address error corrections in terms of the physical and psychological requirements needed to elicit a change in performance of a specific golf or course management skill. High school and college golf coaches must be able to detect the most flagrant problem within a golf swing, provide a correction or cue for the problem, then design a practice program that will allow for a change in performance to occur. This instructional process combined with the development of strategies for course management occur within a limited time frame, therefore the following sections will address the most frequent sources of error in competitive golfers.

SET-UP FOR SUCCESS

The set-up phase of the golf swing prepares the mind and body for the execution of the golf shot. During this preparatory time the golfer factors into his/her shot plan, a multitude of variables that will contribute to the outcome of a given shot. A few common variables that affect shot production are weather conditions, competitive situation, performance on the preceding hole, level of experience, and the physical condition of the golfer. The set-up process is a significant factor in determining the success of any golf swing.



Preparing the Mind

Consistent shot execution is determined by the sequential execution of a preshot routine and the sequential execution of various swing mechanics. Every preshot routine begins with the golfer positioned behind the ball, facing the target. During this time the golfer evaluates the variables that are pertinent to the upcoming shot, determines the technique required to execute the shot, selects a club, and forms a positive mental image of the shot. As the golfer is forming a positive image for the upcoming shot, he/she should perform a few practice swings to establish a "feel" for the shot to be implemented.

Preparing the Body

Once the golfer has prepared the mind for the shot at hand, he/she then set up to the ball. This is also known as "addressing the ball". The setup is the foundation of all correctly executed golf swings. In fact, the majority of

errant shots are generated as a result of setup errors. Establishing the correct setup is a rote function. No further thought need be given to the setup position once it has been correctly established prior to each swing. The components of the setup must be completed in sequential order as listed on the previous illustration.

INITIATING THE SWING

Upon completion of the physical and psychological aspects of the set-up phase, the golfer should immediately initiate the swing. The coach must pay particular attention to the amount of time that elapses between the completion of the setup and the onset of shot execution. If the golfer spends more than a second or two prior to commencing the swing, he/she must be instructed to step away from the ball and repeat the entire setup process. Allowing a player to stand over the ball for an excessive amount of time indicates uncertainty and/or lack of confidence regarding the swing that is to be taken. Such hesitation will ultimately produce an errant shot.

SEQUENTIAL ANALYSIS: SETUP

The golf coach must employ a sequential analysis for error detection and correction in the setup. The recommended sequential analysis for the setup is as follows:

1. Grip Evaluation
2. Stance
3. Ball Position Within the Stance
4. Body Posture
5. Target Alignment

It is imperative that each of these elements of the setup are correct in order to maximize shot production and minimize golf injuries.

SHOT PLANNING

In planning a golf shot, the golfer first surveys the distance and direction required for the shot while also

giving consideration to an assortment of other environmental variables, such as geographical features. Next, the golfer constructs a foundation, the setup, for the upcoming swing bases on sound biomechanical principles. It is imperative that the golf coach not proceed to the analysis or correction of the elements of the full swing until the player has learned and can repeatedly execute the correct setup position. The setup phase of the golf swing prepares the player's mind and body to effectively produce a mechanically sound and productive golf swing.

COACHING CONSIDERATIONS: THE FULL SWING

Often times, young golfers aspiring to join their high school or college team have taken lessons from several golf instructors or have read a variety of golf instructional articles without ever being given the same information or instructions. As a result these players often times find themselves overwhelmed by a collection of ideas that cumulatively are of no value. This is especially true in terms of instructional articles that reference the biomechanics of the full swing.

The objective of coaching the full swing is to provide the player with swing cues required to strike the ball on the "sweet spot" of the clubface, utilizing the principles of equilibrium, motion, and force. The player's consistent execution of the full swing from shot to shot is dependent upon the instructional application of the biomechanical principles to the four components of the full swing.

The full swing should be taught and analyzed as a circular motion. The coach must limit the presentation of swing mechanics and analysis to a minimum amount of selected pieces of information. This information must be directly relevant to the development of a circular motion. The golf coaches knowledge of the components of the full swing should be used exclusively as a diagnostic tool. The coach should analyze the player's movement and establish a sequential order of cause/effect swing corrections.

The full swing is a circular motion that is made up of two levers. The first lever includes the shoulders, arms, and hands rotating about an axis in the lower portion of the sternum. The second lever consists of an angular

relationship between the clubshaft and the hands; specifically the angle of the wrists at the top of the backswing. The sequential functioning of these two levers within the circular motion defines the technique required to produce a controlled swing. The full swing must exhibit a sequence of movements that form a circular motion. A circular motion will produce optimum and consistence amounts of force from swing to swing, regardless of the club being used.

Quality coaching requires effective analysis of the player's swing motion. Each practice session involving the full swing, should begin with the coaches visual and verbal analysis of the swing. This analysis will provide the coach with the opportunity to formulate a plan for error correction. The coach should ask the player about the problem they think they are experiencing, and then inquire as to the pattern of ball flight including trajectory, direction, and distance of shots. Finally the golf coach must watch the student execute approximately ten golf shots in order to sequentially analyze the player's full swing. The sequential analysis of the full swing is as follows:

1. Evaluation of the Setup Process
2. Initiation of the Backswing
3. Body and Hand Position - Top of Backswing
4. Initiation of the Forward Swing
5. Swing Path of Forward Swing
6. Body Position at Impact
7. Hand-Wrist Release at Impact
8. Extension and Direction of Follow Through
9. Body Position at Finish of Swing

Although there are nine observations in the sequential analysis of the full swing, the coach must exercise caution when acting upon what has been observed. The coach must identify the most significant problem, develop teaching cues relative to the observation, followed by prescribing practice techniques that will reinforce and automate the

correct movement. Replacing a single movement within the swing, requires the player to execute approximately sixty correct swings per day for thirty days in order for the correct motion to be successfully integrated into the player's swing. Thus, it is vital that coaches only address the most flagrant swing error as the length of a competitive high school or college season does not allow for multiple swing changes. Attempting multiple swing changes in a condensed period of time will cause the player to become mechanical. A player needs enough time to practice an error correction in order to prevent the mechanical thought process from overriding the psychological processes required for course management during competition.

Effective coaching of the full swing requires:

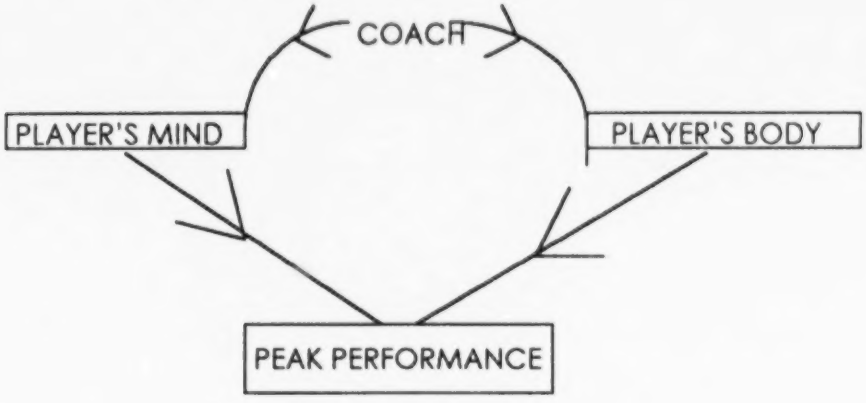
- A coaches sequential knowledge of the four components of the full swing; setup, backswing, forward swing, and follow through.

- The coach's capability to provide accurate visual illustrations i.e. video, photographs, or example, of the movement to be corrected.

- The use of concise verbal descriptors that become the player's execution cue or swing thought. Verbal information must be kept to a minimum used only as needed. A coach must have the capability to convey a single swing thought in a multitude of ways, as each player will interpret and process verbal information differently.

Golf movement descriptions and illustrations must be precise. The execution of the golf swing is dependent upon kinesthetic sense and swing thoughts, that are unique to each player.

THE BRIDGE OF SUCCESS: BODY -- MIND CONNECTION



The golf coach must provide players with the thoughts and skills necessary to bridge the gap between the player's mind and body. This bridge must be strong enough to bear the weight of player stresses emanating from competition, peers, parents, playing a difficult shot, striving for a personal best performance, and a variety of environmental conditions.

KEEPING INSTRUCTION SIMPLE FOR SUCCESS

Keeping golf instruction simple is the support mechanism for the bridge that gaps the golfer's mind and body. Effective coaches are able to transform the complexities of the golf swing and the challenges of the course, into simple concepts. The most difficult aspect of coaching golf is keeping the information provided to the players simple. Coaches must not burden players with mechanical data or trial and error methods of correcting a problem. This type of information clutters the players mind and tends to surface during competitive situations. Thus, the player's mind is no longer focused on the acquisition of the goal at hand, rather is distracted with a myriad of confusing thoughts.

INSTRUCTION VS TIME

The average interscholastic or intercollegiate golf season only allows enough time for one to two fundamental swing changes or corrections. The golf coach must be sure

that a specific swing change has become automated as a result of practice before attempting to correct other errors. Player's can only change one performance at a time. Coaches must resist the urge to make multiple corrections over a short period of time. Bridging the gap between the player's mind and body requires patience. Teaching and learning one fundamental at a time requires patience on the part of the coach and the player.

COACHING LANGUAGE

Negative thinking and bad swing thoughts create fear within the player during shot execution. Fear creates tension in the body that prevents the execution of effortless swings. As a result of fear, the player is not capable of achieving a large percentage of the 72 goals that he/she is striving to attain during each round of golf. The language of the coach is a critical element in the generation of positive attitudes among team members. Coaches should refrain from using words that have negative implications. Images are often created from words. Negative words create negative images within the mind of the player. Therefore in every instance, the coach must refer to what the golfer should have done correctly not what the player did wrong. Careful consideration must be given to the selection of words and phrases utilized by golf coaches.

BRIDGING THE GAP

The mystical transformation of golf knowledge into effective shot production will occur if coaches are successful in bridging the gap between the player's mind and body. Bridging the gap requires the player's use of imagery during the setup phase of the swing, an uninterrupted attention to the execution of the swing, and the ability to detect and interpret cues inherent to the golf course environment.

SUGGESTED READING

Hogan, B. (1985). *Five Lessons: The Modern Fundamentals of Golf.* Fireside.

Murphy, M. (1973). *Golf in the Kingdom.* Dell.

Penick, H. (1992). *Harvey Penick's Little Red Book.* Simon and Schuster.

Rotella, R. (1981). *Mind Mastery for Winning Golf.* Prentice Hall.